

Inspiration for Czech Social Pedagogy – The Legacy of Ryszard Wroczyński

Inspirace pro českou sociální pedagogiku – odkaz Ryszarda Wroczyńskiego

Václav Bělík¹

Abstract:

This paper focuses on current topics in social pedagogy. It focuses on three areas of social pedagogy that reflect the work of Polish social pedagogue R. Wroczyński. His work is extensive and covers the whole spectrum of social pedagogy topics. These include research on socially urgent topics essential for the development of society, then an orientation towards research, characterisation and analysis of the topic of the social environment, and then a strong orientation towards positive values and their development. All of these themes are relevant in contemporary social pedagogy and challenge further research.

Keywords:

Social pedagogy; social environment; current topics; positive values

Abstrakt:


Příspěvek se zaměřuje na aktuální témata sociální pedagogiky. Soustředí se na tři oblasti sociální pedagogiky, které reflektují dílo polského sociálního pedagoga R. Wroczyńskiego. Jeho dílo je obsáhlé a zahrnuje celé spektrum témat sociální pedagogiky. Jedná se o výzkum sociálně naléhavých a pro rozvoj společnosti podstatných témat, dále pak orientace na výzkum, charakteristiku a analýzu tématu sociálního prostředí a následně silná orientace na pozitivní hodnoty a jejich rozvoj. Všechna tato témata jsou aktuální i v současné sociální pedagogice a jsou výzvou pro další zkoumání.

Klíčová slova:

Sociální pedagogika; sociální prostředí; aktuální témata; pozitivní hodnoty

On the legacy of Ryszard Wroczyński

Contemporary Czech social pedagogy is undergoing many changes. There is a plethora of problems that occur in society, their number is increasing, but also their intensity. New threats are emerging for all age groups and not only individuals but also entire social groups are finding themselves in challenging situations. In this situation, it seems more

¹ Institute of Social Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Hradec Králové, The Czech Republic, vaclav.belik@uhk.cz, ORCID 

than necessary to have suitably educated, personally mature and professionally oriented social educators who act both preventively and prophylactically in various settings.

At present, we find a number of themes, which we will discuss further in the text. Traditionally, social pedagogy has been regarded as a multiparadigmatic science in terms of the spectrum of its different focuses. Increasingly, the paradigm of helping those in need from the perspective of prevention and therapy is emerging as a unifying paradigm.

In the development of Czech social pedagogy, it is necessary to look for inspiration from important authors who have contributed significantly to the development of the field in the past. One of them is the Polish pedagogue Richard Wroczyński (1909–1987). In the following article, among other sources, we draw on the author's monograph *Social Pedagogy* (1968), as well as the essay *Wroczyński (1909–1987) - życie i dzieło* by T. Pilch and W. Theiss published in 2019 in the scientific journal *Pedagogika Społeczna*, and other sources.

R. Wroczyński was a fundamental figure in the formation of Polish social pedagogy and indirectly contributed to the development of Czech social pedagogy. He worked at the University of Warsaw and helped to build up the University in the field of pedagogical sciences - in didactics, practices, curricula, as well as in the organisation of the University itself.

In 1953 Ryszard Wroczyński as an associate professor actively participated in the organisation of the Faculty of Education. His initiatives shaped the faculty's activities so that not only teachers were educated, but above all people with a strong humanistic outlook who wanted to work in the field of foster care, social rehabilitation, leisure, and with specialists in adult education and animators of social life.

Thanks to this, the Faculty of Education became a model of modern teacher education and was soon followed by other faculties preparing teachers at universities in Poland. Professor Wroczyński was the founder of the Department of Social Pedagogy in 1957; after the department founded by Helena Radlińska in 1949 at the University of Lodz, which was closed in 1953 only to be reopened in 1962, it was the second department in this field in the history of Polish pedagogy. For five years, therefore, the Warsaw department was the only one to bravely defend the discipline in Poland against the predators who sought its liquidation as a discipline with bourgeois-Christian roots. Wroczyński belonged to the group of the three main creators of social pedagogy in Poland. This group consisted of Professor Helena Radlińska and two of her students: Alexander Kamiński and Ryszard Wroczyński himself. Professor Wroczyński, despite his numerous historical works, of which *History of Physical Culture* is the first and only monograph in Polish literature of such a scale, was primarily concerned with issues of social pedagogy. We consider Professor Wroczyński's work in this field to be the fulfilment of the work of Helena Radlińska and Aleksander Kaminski and the completion of the transformation of social pedagogy into an independent scientific discipline. Symbolic is the collective work, which was created on his initiative and under the editorship and editorship of T. Pilch under the title *Methodology of Social Pedagogy* (1974). The basic characteristic of Wroczyński's social pedagogy was its integrative way of understanding. The professor did not divide the discipline into departments or sub-disciplines. The very diverse subject matter of social pedagogy was subordinated to a primary goal – a social environment shaped by man's own efforts and in the name of man's humanistic ideals. Four editions of the textbook *Social Pedagogy* (1974, 1976, 1979, 1985) follow this principle and develop the idea of a parallel theory of education in *Education Outside the School* (1968). It is about

developing and strengthening the heroic aspect of social pedagogy, in which the conditions and way of life of the individual depend on his own commitment and effort (Pilch, Theiss, 2019).

The first inspiration we see in Ryszard Wroczyński's work is a strong orientation towards socially urgent topics that affect the lifestyle of broad groups of the population.

The research topics were clearly focused on socially important issues that affected the life of the whole country. The research was also characterised by a robust practical methodology. It was not about conforming to a top-down scientific policy, as recommended by the People's Republic of Poland (PRL), nor was it about moving according to the narrow rules of scientism, which had a monopoly on science and ruled contemporary pedagogy at the time. It was a kind of pedagogical "logical positivism", a change of practice from the roots, resulting from sound and pragmatic actions. (Pilch, Theiss, 2019)

This outline on socially exposed topics is also based on the ideas of Helena Radlińska, who emphasizes the social commitment of social educators to have the courage to change reality.

Radlińska shows the need to mobilise and use all social forces and attaches great importance to after-school education, cultural assistance and all social services. Finding out the causes of the situation under study in cases requiring social assistance and searching for mobilisable forces, factors that can be used to compensate for deficiencies, satisfy unmet needs, prevent imminent danger - this is what Radlińska sees as the essence of social service, which includes pedagogy and social policy.

Just as intellectual education cannot stop at the passive acquisition of knowledge, but must lead to independent thinking and stimulate creativity, so spiritual education should contribute to the harmony of knowledge and life, to the expressive assimilation of "invisible" goods, linking them to the whole content of spiritual experiences (Radlińska, 1935).

Wroczyński adds: Education in today's world of enormous development of a broadly conceived culture is a much more complex process than in previous historical periods. In addition to the organized education and training in school, a wide range of developmental stimuli outside school influence children and youth. Nowadays, out-of-school influences do not rely on patterns and norms transmitted by the basic social groups (family, peer groups, local environment) in which the young generation lives, but are more associated with cultural influences (Wroczyński, 1968, p. 278).

The second inspiration is the focus on research, analysis and positive development of the social environment. Here, too, we can see the inspiration of the work and ideas of H. Radlińska.

H. Radlińska defines the environment as a set of conditions in which an individual exists and the factors that shape his/her personality and which act permanently or for a longer period of time. (Radlińska, 1935)

In his work, R. Wroczyński deals in detail with the issue of the environment and its cognition, defines the environment and presents variously classified typologies of the environment, the role of man in individual environments. He devotes a special chapter to the importance of environmental science for the theory and practice of education. Various methods and techniques for investigating and measuring the environment are presented

as inspiring for the present. Special consideration is given to out-of-school educational environments, including the family, the local environment, and peer groups.

In addition to various typologies, Wroczyński also defines two concepts of environment and surroundings. The environment is thus a set of relatively stable conditions and stimuli that are influenced by various factors. The environment is much more changeable, unstable, fragile, and subject to fluctuating influences. The environment is also a broader term encompassing the external structure of life, regardless of whether it is stable or changeable and whether it is the source of developmental stimuli (Wroczyński, 1968, pp. 71–73).

This inspiration is very important for the Czech environment. Research on the social environment in terms of screening, analysis and interpretation of results to find ways for positive influence.

Positive development of the social environment is crucial in areas that have a direct impact on the quality of life of individuals and communities:

Areas for positive development of the social environment

1. **Education and awareness:** improving access to quality education for all age groups, promoting lifelong learning and developing the skills needed for the modern labour market. The role of the social educator in the school environment could help in this area.
2. **Health education, prevention and support for the social environment for health care:** ensuring access to and quality of health care, promoting prevention programmes and improving mental health.
3. **Social inclusion:** promoting the inclusion of marginalised groups, combating discrimination and promoting equality. This includes initiatives to promote employment, access to housing and social services.
4. **Community Development:** strengthening positive community links, supporting local projects and improving infrastructure. The goal is to create cohesive and active communities that work together to solve local problems.
5. **Sustainable development of the environment and the development of the human role in nature:** Protecting the environment, promoting sustainable development and raising awareness of environmental issues. This includes projects to reduce emissions, recycle and protect natural resources. All this is reflected in the field of education not only in the school environment but also in out-of-school settings.
6. **Inequality-enhancing economic development:** promoting economic growth, creating jobs and improving living conditions. At the same time, education, support, counselling and possible interventions for disadvantaged individuals, families and entire localities are important in this area.
7. **Safety and Crime Prevention:** improving community safety, promoting prevention programs and effectively addressing crime. This includes supporting victims of crime and reintegrating offenders into society. The issue of safety is also important for education as it is one of the themes of health promotion.
8. **Promoting meaningful leisure:** Promoting cultural activities, sports and leisure activities that contribute to the overall development of individuals and communities. This includes preserving cultural heritage and promoting creativity.

Another area that is inspiring for contemporary Czech social pedagogy is the **orientation towards positive values**. It is not only about education towards positive values, but also about a strong and unquestionable value anchoring of social educators themselves.

This was an attempt to remove values from social pedagogy that always end tragically, while the escape into the world of generalizations without individual solutions makes such pedagogy only partially successful. This methodological and pragmatic stance is confirmed today by one of the common methods in research, namely research through action. In the social sciences and the humanities, no other way has yet been found to arrive at objective and reliable knowledge that is at the same time free from an axiological context (Pilch, Theiss, 2019).

If we were to define the current themes of social pedagogy, we would in a general way agree in many ways with the typology of R. Wroczyński:

- a) ideological foundations of education and (social) pedagogical thinking in Poland and abroad;
- b) promoting physical education and sport;
- c) methodology of social pedagogy;
- d) theoretical basis and practice of environmental education;
- e) theory and practice of care pedagogy;
- f) continuing education, concurrent training and adult education;
- g) developing the role of the teacher and educator in the school and community;
- h) exploring education and its social conditioning;
- i) tasks for the development of social pedagogy;
- j) the environment and its definition, including research and measurement techniques;
- k) the role of the out-of-school environment in education, including leisure time issues;
- l) the demands of a changing society on education;
- m) requirement for social engagement of the public sector and social educators.

The ideological anchoring of Wroczyński's social pedagogy is impressively illustrated in the above quotation: from its beginning, social pedagogy has sought ways to alleviate the conflicts and threats that occur in the field of interpersonal relations. It was born out of a resistance to the evil and misery that plagued European communities in the second half of the nineteenth century. The pathology of interpersonal relations now seems to have become such a prominent feature of our times that the search for means to overcome it has become a critical need. The world is such that there is an increasing amount of danger, powerlessness and loneliness. Professor Wroczyński was aware of this, and in his own specific and pragmatic way understood the role of his discipline in the system of repairing human relations throughout the world and in providing social safeguards. After all, it must be remembered that this was a time of hostile division of the world, when feelings of fear, threat and insecurity were common, and constraints, both material and political, were part of everyday life. (Pilch, Theiss, 2019)

If we talk about the current challenges for social pedagogues in the Czech environment, the current topics include, among others, the school environment and from it comes a wide range of areas of positive influence on lifestyle. Thus, in the school environment, the position of the social educator has appeared more frequently in recent years, addressing topics that are inherent to it. Modern social pedagogy topics include those

listed below. It is clear that a number of new topics are emerging nowadays (Daněk et al., 2024; Šmída, Čech, 2024; Lorenzová, 2023; Bendl, 2016; Kraus, 2014):

1. working with pupils with social disadvantages;
2. working with the family environment and problems stemming from the family environment;
3. provision of social counselling;
4. prevention and intervention for a diverse range of pupil problems;
5. working with school failure;
6. mental health support;
7. crisis intervention;
8. organisation of leisure activities;
9. working with new technologies and trends;
10. sustainability and environmental education.

In the above text we have focused on three areas of social pedagogy that reflect the work of R. Wroczyński. His work is extensive and covers the whole spectrum of social pedagogy topics. These include research on socially urgent topics essential for the development of society, then an orientation towards research, characterisation and analysis of the topic of the social environment, and then a strong orientation towards positive values and their development. All these topics are relevant in contemporary social pedagogy and challenge further research.

References

- Bendl, S. (2016). *Základy sociální pedagogiky*. Univerzita Karlova, Pedagogická fakulta.
- Daněk, J., Šmída, J., Blábolilová, N., Charvátová Kohoutová, D., Cejpek Blašítková, L., Čech, T., Hladík, J., Öbrink Hobzová, M., Lorenzová, J., Kubzová, L., & Procházka, M. (2024). *Metodika práce pro sociální pedagogiky*. Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci.
- Kraus, B. (2014). *Základy sociální pedagogiky* (2. vyd.). Portál.
- Lorenzová, J. (2023). *Sociální pedagogika: věda, praxe a profese v souvislostech*. Vysoká škola chemicko-technologická v Praze.
- Pilch, T., & Theiss, W. (2014). Ryszard Wroczyński (1909–1987) - życie i dzieło. *Pedagogika społeczna*, 2014(4), 63–76.
- Radlińska, H. (1935). *Výchovný postoj k sociálnímu prostředí. Náčrtky sociální pedagogiky*.
- Šmída, J., Čech, T., Hormandlová, T., & Jůvová, A. (2024). *Sociální pedagog a jeho role v kontextu potřeb základních škol*. Vydavatelství Univerzity Palackého.
- Wroczyński, R. (1968). *Socialna pedagogika*. SPN.
- Wroczyński, R. (1973). *Permanenční vzdělávání: Problémy – perspektiva*. Státy, Vydavatel Nauk.
- Wroczyński, R. (1979). *Pedagogika społeczna* (Wydanie III rozszerzone, zmienione). Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.
- Wroczyński, R. (1985). *Obecné dějiny tělesné výchovy a sportu* (2., prodloužené vyd.). Ossoliński National Institute.

Author:

dr hab. doc. PhDr. Václav Bělík, Ph.D.

University of Hradec Králové,

Faculty of Education, Institute of Social Studies

The Czech Republic

vaclav.belik@uhk.cz

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6717-0213>

© University of Hradec Králové, Faculty of Education, Institute of Social Studies, 2025

CC-BY-SA 4.0